

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace paragraph [0018] with the following amended paragraph:

[0018] FIG. 7A is a diagram illustrating a calculated ~~field~~ field distribution for a focused radially polarized laser beam incident on a dielectric/air interface with an aluminum tip in an optical element in a system;

Please replace paragraph [0031] with the following amended paragraph:

[0031] The operation of the system 10(1) will now be described with reference to FIGS. 1A-1D. In this method, a fundamental Gaussian laser mode is passed through or reflected from a phase plate which delays one half of the beam by a phase shift of 180 degrees. Subsequent spatial filtering selects the desired 'Hermite-Gaussian 10' mode. If strongly focused, then a longitudinal field is generated in the focus. This procedure is outlined in L.Novotny, E.J. Sanchez, and X.S. Xie, ``Near-field optical imaging using metal tips illuminated by higher-order Hermite-Gaussian beams," Ultramicroscopy vol.71, pp.21-29, 1998, which is herein incorporated by reference. The two orthogonal 'Hermite-Gaussian 10' modes can be superimposed using, for example, the method is described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/759,913, filed on January 12, 2001 which is commonly owned and is herein incorporated by reference.